

The Tortoise or the Hare? Media Coverage and Legislative Success

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ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between the level of media coverage on a proposed legislation and the likelihood of its enactment into law? This study investigates whether or not media coverage quickens the passage of legislative bills. The conventional notion is that salient bills are enacted sooner because media attention facilitates the process. This study argues, on the contrary, that increased media coverage actually attenuates legislative speed. It draws from media effects literature which looks at media not just as a conduit, but as a contributor that pulls more actors and interests into the policy arena. Clashes of interests cause instability that slows down the policy process. Using multiple regression analysis, this study tests the effects of media coverage on the length of time a bill would take before enactment. A total of 234 bills from the 14th and 15th Congresses of the Philippines were analyzed. Online articles from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The Philippine Star* citing these bills were counted. The findings suggest that increased media coverage slows down the legislative process but this media effect is obscured by the higher quickening effect of bill urgency. The president, it appears, predominates and remains to be a potent actor in the policy process. Policy entrepreneurs are recommended to rely not only on media attention but to explore other strategies internal and external to the legislature. Future research should consider qualitative analysis, include other variables, and expand the selection of bills and news sources.

Keywords: Congress of the Philippines, legislative success, legislative speed, media attention, policymaking, punctuated equilibrium

What is the relationship between the level of media attention on a legislative proposal and the speed of its enactment into law? Does media attention speed up or slow down the lawmaking process? Can media attention explain why many bills are ignored and only a few gets passed?

In 2012, the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act (now RH Law) was in the spotlight of Philippine news media, sparking debates across the country. The reproductive health policy issue has been in Congress for more than a decade. Lobbyists and their opponents presented their opinions in several news reports in an effort to influence the legislative floor. The bill was signed into law (Republic Act 10354) in December 2012, after the President declared the measure a priority.

Meanwhile, the President enacted the Cybercrime Prevention Act into law without fanfare (Republic Act 10175), three months before RH bill's historic passage. Unlike the RH Bill, this bill did not stay long in the legislature.¹ It was never certified as priority legislation. Only after its enactment was it criticized for potentially violating the constitutional right to free speech. Prior to enactment, it sparsely received media coverage.

What happened here? Policy entrepreneurs usually seek media attention to "advertise" their proposed legislation. This behavior is a result of the internal characteristics of the Philippine Congress. Legislators would compete (or cooperate) with 323 colleagues and then convince a committee to include their bill in the agenda. They would suffer long hours deliberating in three readings and a bicameral session (should their bill even reach that stage). They would also wait desperately for the President's endorsement. In the end, they would hope the President will sign their bill.

Merely relying on the given institutional setup seems rather unproductive. Hence, rational legislators would find an "out-of-the-box" solution to convince colleagues to support their bills. Grabbing media attention is one such solution. With its power to send information at light speed, media is expected to directly influence the legislative floor by overwhelming it with information

that can effectively change or set the priorities in policymaking. Indirectly, media can sway the public into supporting or opposing a bill, which sets the direction for their representatives in Congress.

However, the cases of RH and Cybercrime laws anecdotally suggest otherwise. High-attention bills experience delays whereas low-key legislations have an express trip to enactment. Theoretically, this happens because media is not just a conduit but also a contributor (Shanahan, McBeth, Hathaway, & Arnell, 2008). As an active contributor, media causes instability in the policy process. Under a context of free and commercial media, anyone who yields media attention can feed changes in legislative content or policy agenda. These changes are expected to increase the length and the number of discussions and debates, which would put the brakes on the legislative process.

This research aims to show empirically that the relationship between legislative speed and media coverage is negative rather than positive. By focusing on the Philippine Congress, this study contributes to legislative studies which are predominantly Western. It is hoped that the findings will help lobbyists and legislators reconsider their strategies in the legislative floor.

A total of 234 bills were collected via the Legislative Information System (LEGIS) of the Philippine Congress covering all enacted bills during the 14th and 15th Congresses, but excluding bills of local significance, yearly appropriations, and legislative franchises. Legislative success is defined as bill enactment at the shortest possible time (Panao, 2014). Time pertains to the number of days from a bill's proposal to its enactment. On the other hand, media attention refers to the number of articles citing or mentioning the bill after it was proposed and before its enactment. Individual news articles published on the official websites of the Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI) and The Philippine Star (STAR) were collected. PDI and STAR are both top newspapers in terms of readership according to the 2013 Nielsen Consumer and Media View Survey.² Controls include presidential agenda, number of coauthors, chamber of origin, and socioeconomic condition.

The paper proceeds by first discussing extant literature on media and legislative policymaking. The conceptual and operational definitions of the variables used in this study is presented in the subsequent section. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology and the presentation of results. The conclusion wraps up the findings and recommends areas for further research.

Media in Politics

What is the role of media in politics? Is it a conduit (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), or a contributor (Shanahan et al., 2008)? As contributor, media purportedly creates conflict by framing stories and showing policies and issues that can be inconsistent with other reports. As conduit, on the other hand, media is assumed to be a neutral, pluralist information-sender, free of preference or bias.

Studies suggest that mass media are imperfect actors (Oates, 2008). Media outlets have to decide which information are to be reported since it cannot report all information. Some issues or events will have to gain more attention than others (Boyd, 2011). In the content of reports, some facts will have to be selected over others (Soroka, Lawlor, Farnsworth, & Young, 2012); some words and expressions will have to be used (Iyengar, 1996); and some issues will have to be highlighted over others (Newton & Van Deth, 2010). This practice is what is referred to as framing. Through framing, media introduces and recommends information, values, and beliefs in the political arena that are not consistent with the original and actual information. Given that media is inevitably biased, it is expected to cause friction in the political process.

Media Coverage and Policymaking

How, then, does media attention or coverage influence the policy process? Cook et al. (1983) argues that media influences policymaking directly because journalists cooperate with government officials and key policy actors, and not because particular news stories are aired. In an investigation of U.S. state legislatures, Cooper (2002) enumerates several media tactics in the chamber, such as contacting legislators and government

agencies. Related studies highlight that legislators need media to boost publicity boost in order to gain favors from colleagues and constituents and to improve their chances of reelection (Cooper, 2002; Tan & Weaver, 2007). Publicity also allows them to put their bills in the legislative agenda and to influence the content of bills (Melenhorst, 2014).

Moreover, policy content can also be directed toward a particular framing of issues (Soroka et al., 2012; Kiss, 2013; Melenhorst, 2014). The introduction of new policies can also be knee-jerk reactions to news items about issues framed as a “public problem” (Lima & Siegel, 1999; Yanovitzky, 2002).

Other studies suggest that media indirectly influences policymaking. Fay et al. (1983) observed that public opinion acts as an intervening variable between media and policymaking. Subsequent studies analyzing media frames employed in making news items on issues such as nuclear energy (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), poverty (Iyengar, 1990), public order and socio-economic welfare (Iyengar, 1996), public tolerance of the Ku Klux Klan (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997), racial policy preferences (Kellstedt, 2000), and pesticide decisions of the Environmental Protection Agency (Yates & Stroup, 2000) support this view. These studies suggest that media can define and measure the importance of policy issues in the public’s perspective. Moreover, media framing can influence policy direction by provoking public opinion or action to pressure policymakers to formulate or change a policy (Holder & Treno, 1997; Soroka et al. 2012; Chin, 2011).

Comprehensive Rationality and Punctuated Equilibrium

Just like reporters and journalists, policymakers also have limited cognitive capacities (Tan & Weaver, 2007). They cannot entertain all interests and problems that require policy response (Baumgartner, Jones, & Leech, 1997). Whereas media outlets decide on which issues or events to cover, policymakers will have to selectively decide which policy to put on top of the agenda by exercising comprehensive rationality (Cairney, 2011).

Given their human limitation, policymakers can effectively make policies only by stabilizing the policy process through the establishment of “policy monopolies” (Cairney, 2011; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). As a policy venue, the legislative floor is filled with monopolies which are manifested through alliances, parties, and committees. Formulating and maintaining a monopoly is crucial for policy entrepreneurs to gain priority and get higher chances of success. Policymakers with ‘ignored’ bills need to disrupt these monopolies by seeking other venues (e.g. through media outlets). Changes in policy arise only when there is a critical amount of attention on the established policy monopoly (Cairney, 2011). More often than not, policymakers will respond greatly to external pressures with the influx of new information (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005).

There can either be a positive or negative feedback on policies, according to Baumgartner and Jones’ (1993) concept of punctuated equilibrium (see also Hay, 2002). This construes policymaking as a process characterized by changes that are rather sudden and dramatic than incremental or subtle. Positive feedback sustains the policy direction, whereas negative feedback changes it. The former implies stability and continuance of policymaking, while the latter implies disruption.

Baumgartner and Jones (1993) suggest that because reporters more or less follow the agenda presented to them by the legislature as an institution, media attention causes positive feedbacks. In contrast, this study argues that media attention actually brings negative feedback.

Determinants of Legislative Success

The studies presented above have a common problem—they were unable to link media effects with actual policy outcomes because of their concentration on framing and agenda-setting (Wolfe, Jones, & Baumgartner, 2013). They can only tell the chances of a bill being proposed in the legislature, but not the chances of enactment. The studies below tried to address this limitation.

Wolfe's (2012) work provided evidence on the effect of media coverage on legislative speed. By performing a survival analysis of 247 bills enacted in the U.S. Congress in relation to levels of media attention while controlling for the level of internal legislative attention, Wolfe found that bills with high media coverage stayed longer in the legislature, though this effect eventually subsides in the longer term.

Woon (2009) studied legislative proposals in the U.S. Senate and found that senators with particular committee assignments and leadership positions increase the benefits of issue attention and sponsorship of certain bills, ultimately increasing the chances of their bills being passed into legislation. In addition, Lazarus (2013) found that bills are deliberately aligned toward the direction of salient issues in order for legislators to gain electoral favors.

On the other hand, Giannetti, Pedrazzani, and Pinto (2014) studied the legislative and directing boards of the Italian parliament and found that parties actually allocate time among themselves to deliberate certain policies depending on the salience and the ideological or political divisiveness of a policy. They found that highly divisive and salient bills are deliberated longer, adding to legislative delay. In contrast, parties allocate less time on less divisive but highly salient proposals.

Taylor (2014) also performed a survival analysis of bills in the U.S. Congress and found that bills that attract the votes of other legislators, those that are in the presidential agenda, and those that are closer to legislators' ideal points, are passed into law quicker. The incentives for why legislators vote for bills instead of stalling them were analyzed. Taylor considered other variables such as the distance of presidential and majority party ideals from a bill, the entry of new legislators, the number of bills being considered, and the number of days until the end of Congress when the bill was introduced, but found them to be statistically insignificant.

Jones, Thomas, and Wolfe (2014) suggest that policymaking may take time exceedingly because of "policy bubbles." A term

used in economics, policy bubbles refer to overinvestment in a policy as a result of policymakers' resolve to get maximum benefits. Policymakers would employ policy instruments (in the form of budget commitment or regulatory requirement) to affect policy goals. Concentration on that policy, therefore, becomes sustained whereas other policies are ignored. Overinvestment occurs when the cost of delays and the use of policy instruments eventually exceed the expected benefits that can be obtained from a policy.

In Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile—which follow a presidential system and a bicameral legislature like the Philippines—there is considerable evidence that legislative bills which are included in the presidential agenda have higher chances of legislative success (Aleman & Navia, 2009; Aleman & Calvo, 2008, 2010; Figueiredo, Salles, & Vieira, 2009). These studies also point to the beneficial effect of united or majority government (in terms of coalitions) and the Senate origin of bills in increasing legislative productivity.

Pertaining to the Philippines, Pano (2014) used event history to analyze bills filed between the 8th and the 14th Congress and found that bills certified urgent by the president enjoy better chances of legislative success. However, at some point the quickening effect of urgency diminishes. Controlling for presidential tenure, political kinship, legislator seniority, significance (whether local or national), origin (Senate or House), and socioeconomic conditions (monthly inflation), he found that the chief executive, although certainly a dominant actor, does not have a monopoly of the legislative process.

Synthesis

The literature showed substantial ground that media coverage has an effect on policymaking. Most studies, however, are limited to the analysis of agenda-setting and framing which only take a snapshot of the legislative process. Only one study conclusively asserts that increased media coverage slows down policymaking. Fortunately, there are studies on the determinants of legislative dynamics that speeds up or

slows down policymaking. Putting together media coverage and legislative dynamics is important in controlling for other variables other than presidential agenda. Since literature is mostly U.S.-based, this study also helps fill the gap by providing a new context but utilizing established methods to test the effect of media coverage on the speed of policymaking.

Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Dependent Variable

Days from Filing to Enactment

To test the effect of media coverage and other variables on legislative speed, this study will look at the time interval (in days) from a bill's date of filing, to the date of passage, or "event of interest" (Wolfe, 2012; Taylor, 2014). While others define legislative success as productivity, or the number of passed bills per legislator (Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, & Sinclair-Chapman, 2003; Cox & Terry, 2008), some use the proportion of passed over proposed bills, and the number of cosponsored bills (Cox & Terry 2008). For clarity, this study measures 'success' in terms of bill passage at the soonest time (Panao, 2014). Longer time interval (more days) means slower legislative speed. A shorter interval (less days), indicates faster legislative speed.

This study covered a total of 234 Republic Acts³ from the 14th and 15th Congresses, and excluded legislations concerned with annual appropriations, franchises, citizenships, and those of local significance. The period considers the possible variance in the political atmosphere brought by substantive political change marked by the end of a presidential term and the dissolution of Congress (2007-2010), followed by the start of a new presidential term along with a new legislature (2010-2013). Meanwhile, the exclusions are contingent on the main independent variable, since the media sources under consideration are assumed to report general and national, rather than specific or trivial, issues. General annual appropriations are also excluded because these are staple bills (media sources always report about these bills) which could bias the sample.

Independent Variable

Media Coverage

A liberal or commercial model of media is assumed, wherein media outlets or news sources are private and for-profit conglomerates or organizations (Oates, 2008). This implies that media outlets regardless of medium (print, radio, TV, or online) engage in marketing and advertising to maintain or increase profit. This makes them largely dependent on audience viewership or readership. Hence, they are assumed to churn out news items that align with what they perceive to be (potential) public interest (Oates, 2008; Boyd, 2011; Graber, 1984). Such is the case in the Philippines and also applies to the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (PDI) and *The Philippine Star* (STAR) (Florentino-Hofileña, 2004; Frago, 2006).

This model allows for the assertion that media acts as an agenda-setter and issue framer by covering issues in the direction of public opinion or clamor (Iyengar, 1990, 1996; Holder & Treno, 1997; Nelson et al., 1997; Kellstedt, 2000; Yates & Stroup 2000; Soroka et al., 2012; Yanovitzky, 2002; Chin, 2011). Given the aim of profit and the liberal atmosphere in news reporting, there is no control over the entry and exit of interests being conveyed through media attention. Clashes of interests seem to be unavoidable especially in the policy arena. Policy actors are after all also consumers and producers of news items and court media coverage of their policy proposals. Therefore, media attention is expected to slow down the policy process rather than speed it up.

To make this connection, measuring and analyzing the news items media outlets produce is important. Some authors mentioned in the literature watched or listened to TV recordings, scrutinizing especially the audio-visual elements in news presentation. Others resorted to counting or mining information from print or online news articles, taking note of details with regard to placement and manner of writing.

In this study, I measured media attention via newspaper articles, similar to Wolfe's (2012) approach. By analyzing online newspaper articles, I acknowledge some limitations. First is the tradeoff in using print instead of radio or TV, although there are

findings which suggest that newspapers are more effective sources of political information (Chaffee & Frank, 1996; Druckman, 2005). Another limitation is the difference in public reception of online and printed versions of newspapers, although the implications are uncertain. On one hand, different versions do not seem to matter (d'Haenens, Jankowski, & Heuvelman, 2004). On the other, different versions imply different readerships (Schönbach, de Waal, & Lauf, 2005). Regardless, future research is expected to address these limitations.

Given the above assumptions, this study hypothesizes that:

H1: Increased media coverage leads to slower legislative speed.

Control Variables

Acknowledging that media coverage is not the sole determinant of legislative success, this study considered other variables external and internal to the legislative process that may affect legislative speed. These variables are discussed below.

Urgency

In the Philippines, a bill can reflect the presidential agenda by having the President certify it as an urgent measure. In principle, bills certified as priority legislation, are expected to get passed into law much faster or enjoy greater chances of passage. This same observation has been reported in several studies (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Edwards, Barrett, & Peake, 1997; Aleman & Navia, 2009; Figueiredo et al., 2009; Panao, 2014; Taylor, 2014). Urgency also incentivizes rational legislators to support the President's agenda for patronage, pork barrel allocations, and support in the next elections (Jumilla-Abalos, 2003; Caoili, 2006). A bill's urgency should bring positive policy feedback by channeling the support of the legislators toward the passing of that bill. Hence:

H2: Bills certified urgent enjoy faster legislative speed.

Coauthorship

Since only bills that muster enough votes are able to pass through different readings in the floor, bills that enjoy more

support have better chances of passage (Anderson et al., 2003; Lazarus, 2013; Lewis, 2013; Taylor, 2014). Whereas bills usually have only a single author, legislators can ensure votes by seeking coauthors (Jumilla-Abalos, 2003). Using the concept of punctuated equilibrium, coauthorship can help establish a policy monopoly which creates a positive policy feedback. Logically, coauthored bills should be enacted sooner than single-author bills.

H3: Bills with more co-authors have faster legislative speed.

Senate Origin

According to legislative studies in other states, whether or not a bill originated in the Senate has no significant effect on bill passage (Aleman & Navia, 2009; Lewis, 2013). However, a different observation is found in the Philippines (Panao, 2014). Since the Philippine Congress is bicameral, bills can originate from either one chamber or both (in two separate but similar drafts). However, the Senate harnesses an institutional advantage of continuity vis-à-vis the House of Representatives: only half of the Senators are dissolved after an electoral term while the other half is filled up by newcomers (Jumilla-Abalos, 2003; Caoili, 2006). In addition, senators often have more experience than their counterparts in the House not only because of the higher age requirement⁴ but also because most of them have held elective positions previously. All these factors may translate into higher probability of bill passage in the Senate (Panao, 2014). Therefore:

H4: Bills originating from the Senate have faster legislative speed.

Inflation Rate

Bill passage rate may also be affected by socioeconomic conditions. Here, I use inflation rate as a crude proxy for socioeconomic shocks (Panao, 2014). In the Philippines, bills of narrow and programmatic nature are often passed in response to inflationary movements. During periods of high fluctuation in inflation rates, one way to prevent the economy from overheating is for the government to contract and to lessen its spending (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2011). These periods are not

good for passing many bills, especially because most bills involve expenditures. The effect of this inflation on legislative success is worth verifying as the literature ignores it. However, the inflation rate of a bill is set to the 12-month average leading to its date of filing, to account for the latent effects of inflation and to reduce arbitrariness. Hence, this study hypothesizes:

H5: Bills proposed during periods of high inflation have lower legislative speed.

Method and Operationalization

This study tested for the causal effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable using multiple regression analysis. This study posits that legislative speed in terms of days is a function of media coverage, bill urgency, coauthorship, Senate origin, and inflation rate. This proposition is expressed by the model:

$$\text{days} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{media} - \beta_2\text{urgent} - \beta_3\text{coauth} - \beta_4\text{senate} + \beta_5\text{inflation} + u$$

where:

days—is a continuous positive integer that refers to the number of days from a bill's date of filing to the date of its enactment into law. These information are provided by LEGIS. This also covers bills that lapsed into law after 30 days of presidential inaction. If the bill was filed in both houses of Congress, the version with the earlier date of filing will be recognized. Higher value denotes more days and, thus, slower legislative speed. Conversely, smaller value denotes fewer days and, thus, faster legislative speed.

media—refers to a continuous positive integer that indicates the number of PDI and STAR online news (non-editorial, non-feature) articles citing the bills selected in this study and published during the period between the date of filing and the date of passage. An article is counted as a "citation" whenever a bill's number (e.g. as it appears on search query, say, "sb 2976"), title ("an act defining cybercrime, providing for the prevention, investigation, suppression and the imposition of penalties therefor and for other purposes"), or short title ("cybercrime prevention act"), or variant title

(“cybercrime bill”) is cited at least once in the article. A higher value denotes higher media coverage. News article search was done via Google’s Search Engine using search operators (i.e. “site:inquirer.net” and “site:philstar.com”) to mine for articles located in the news outlets’ archives. Quotation marks (e.g. “cybercrime bill”), and time search tool (i.e. from “31-Jan-2012” to “12-Sep-2012”) were also employed to limit the scope of articles. Each item displayed in every search run was checked. False-positive results and duplicate pages were not counted.

urgent—is a binary variable coded “1” if the bill was certified urgent, “0” if otherwise.

coauth—is a continuous positive integer that indicates the number of coauthors a bill had when it was filed. Higher coauth means that a bill has more coauthors.

senate—is a binary variable coded “1” if a bill was first filed in the Senate, “0” if otherwise.

inflation—is a continuous positive integer that reflects the 12-month average monthly inflation rate leading up the month when a bill was filed in Congress. A higher value denotes higher inflation.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive summary of data is shown in Table 1. The table compares the relative effects of media coverage, urgency, coauthorship, congressional origin, and inflation rate on the number of days bills spend in Congress.

On average, a bill would last 408.5 days (1.12 years). The shortest time a bill spent was 50 days (0.14 years), whereas the longest was 1067 days (2.92 years), which nearly spanned a full congressional term. This shows the large variations in legislative speed and motivates us to take a closer look into the factors that determine why some bills pass in a matter of days while others get stuck in the legislative chamber for years.

Let us first look at media coverage. Bills that are featured at least in one news article seem to experience longer time in the legislature, specifically 33% longer on average. Considerably,

Table 1. Number of days spent by bills^a in Congress, N=234^b

| Bill Type | No. of Bills | Mean (days) | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----|------|
| <i>Media coverage</i> | | | | | |
| With media coverage (>0) | 103 | 474.45 | 256.78 | 113 | 1063 |
| Without media coverage (=0) | 131 | 356.65 | 225.18 | 50 | 1067 |
| <i>Urgency</i> | | | | | |
| Certified urgent | 24 | 276.21 | 188.01 | 50 | 735 |
| Not certified as urgent | 210 | 423.62 | 247.83 | 70 | 1067 |
| <i>Co-authorship</i> | | | | | |
| With coauthors (>0) | 224 | 412.75 | 244.81 | 50 | 1067 |
| Without coauthor (=0) | 10 | 313.40 | 270.35 | 126 | 1021 |
| <i>Origin</i> | | | | | |
| Senate origin | 30 | 310.70 | 181.64 | 92 | 835 |
| House origin | 204 | 422.88 | 251.41 | 50 | 1067 |
| <i>Inflation rate</i> | | | | | |
| High inflation (>4.54) ^c | 65 | 343.54 | 129.71 | 70 | 567 |
| Low inflation (<4.54) ^c | 169 | 433.49 | 274.52 | 50 | 1067 |
| <i>All types of bills</i> | 234 | 408.50 | 246.15 | 50 | 1067 |

^a Bills data are based on the collated 14th and 15th Congress records of the Legislative Information System (LEGIS) of the Congress of the Philippines.

^b Excluding yearly appropriations bills and bills granting citizenships and franchises, and including bills that were enacted or lapsed into law.

^c 4.54 is the mean inflation rate for periods when the bills studied were filed, N=234

66% of the bills did not have media coverage, yet they spent less time on average (357 days, in contrast to 474 days). Although inconclusive, these results suggest that somehow media plays a role on bill passage.

Only 10% of the bills were certified urgent, but the certification by the president seems to cut the time these bills spend in Congress by 34% (276 days, in contrast to 424 days). These results imply the significant hastening effect of executive agenda setting. Third is coauthorship, where bills with at least one coauthor seem to stay longer. Single-author bills, on the contrary, enjoy 24% less time in Congress (313 days, in contrast to 413 days). Fourth is

congressional origin, where Senate bills appear to be passed more quickly than House bills by a rate of 27% (311 days, in contrast to 423 days). Last is the average inflation rate, categorized as being above or below the mean. The results imply that bills filed during periods of higher inflation enjoy 21% less time in Congress (344 days, in contrast to 433 days) than those filed during periods of lower inflation.

The above discussion descriptively shows that the indicators employed for this study may indeed have an effect on bill passage. For more conclusive results, regression analysis is performed to test the independent variables for causality on legislative success.

Table 2. Number of days spent by bills^a in Congress, N=234^b

| Variables | Expected sign | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Media coverage | + | 8.459** (3.098) | 1.021*** (0.001) |
| Urgency | - | -251.800*** (35.780) | 0.503*** (0.007) |
| Co-authorship | - | -0.709 (0.494) | 0.999*** (0.000) |
| Senate origin | - | -92.050** (31.480) | 0.781*** (0.009) |
| Inflation | + | -5.160 (6.335) | 1.015*** (0.002) |
| Constant | | 79.930 (41.780) | 133.916*** (2.309) |
| R2 | | 0.5960 | — |
| Pseudo R2 | | — | 0.2492 |
| N | | 234 | 234 |

Standard errors in parentheses. Note: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

^a Bills data are based on the collated 14th and 15th Congress records of the legislative Information System (LEGIS) of the Congress of the Philippines.

^b Excluding yearly appropriations bills and bills granting citizenships and franchises, and including bills that were enacted or lapsed into law

Table 2 summarizes the results of the regression estimates. Model 1 employs ordinary least square regression to measure the impact of the variables. Model 2, on the other hand, utilizes Poisson regression.

Model 1 uses OLS regression, and the results show significant values for media coverage, urgency, and Senate origin. The coefficient for media coverage, while affirming the study's hypothesis, indicates very minimal effect in comparison to the coefficient of urgency. The remaining variables are statistically significant but the effects are insubstantial.

The reason for putting up Model 2 is to provide a robustness test since news articles involve count data. Based on summary statistics, several, if not most, of the bills received zero or no attention. The rest of the bills reported 1 or 2 articles as media coverage but none had higher than 10. Poisson regression is deemed suitable for count data which are skewed and produce only positive integers (Rodriguez, 2007). The coefficients that are indicated under Model 2 are exponentiated and are typically understood as incidence rate ratios. These values will be interpreted along with the discussion below.

Let us observe the regression results for media attention. All else constant, Model 1 suggests that for each count of news article that cites a certain bill, about 8 ½ days will be added to its lifespan in Congress. Model 2, meanwhile, predicts that, additional news article citing a bill increases the lifespan of that bill by 2.1%.⁵ This means that if a bill had a lifespan of 100 days in Congress, that lifespan will increase to 102.1 days. Although the magnitude of the effects varies, both models suggest that media coverage reduces legislative speed. This is also consistent with the existing media effects literature, highlighting the contributive role of media in causing friction in the policy process by throwing in more actors and interests into the arena instead of functioning as a lubricant that increases productivity and efficiency in the policy process. The principle behind this is the reverse application of the punctuated equilibrium theory. Media coverage induces negative feedback

and holds back efforts for policy change. More media coverage means more conflict, more deliberations, and, therefore, more time needed for policy making. The results are consistent with Wolfe's (2012) findings except in the magnitude of the effect of media coverage. For Wolfe, additional media coverage lessens the odds of passage of a bill by 33%. Nonetheless, the results imply that media coverage decreases the chances of legislative success in the Philippines.

The rather interesting effect of media coverage, however, is dwarfed by the large coefficient of urgency as shown in Model 1. All else constant, results suggest that if a bill is certified urgent, legislative delay is reduced by roughly 252 days. Model 2 also suggests a drastic reduction: -50.3%. Both models unanimously suggest that certifying a bill as priority legislation is definitely effective in helping a bill pass into law quickly. Findings also support existing evidence in the literature on the hastening effect of executive agenda-setting. The legislative and executive branches of the Philippines are bound together by mutual relations that involve the grant of pork barrel funds and electoral support from the President. Legislators respond symbiotically by supporting the priority legislations of the President. Another explanation is that urgency causes positive feedback and induces policy change when legislators are incentivized to pass bills quickly. The results, therefore, confirm the second hypothesis.

In contrast to the two previous variables, coauthorship does not seem to be a good determinant of legislative success. All else constant, Model 1 predicts that an additional coauthor would actually reduce a bill's lifespan by less than a day (-0.709) but this is not statistically significant for Model 1. The third hypothesis argues that a bill with more co-authors reduces legislative speed. While this appears to be the case, it is significant only for Model 2 (-0.1%). Moreover, the gravity of the effect is trivial. One possible explanation for this is that legislators appear as authors only on paper. Seeking the support of colleagues may be the least of many options they consider. Further research on the effect of coauthorship is definitely in order.

Meanwhile, bills originating from the Senate seem to enjoy a reduction of 92 days in their lifespan in Congress, all else constant, based on Model 1. Model 2 confirms this, suggesting that if a bill originated from the Senate, its lifespan will be reduced by 22%. Both models are consistent with extant literature and confirm the fourth hypothesis. It is worth mentioning that the Senate possesses an institutional advantage over its counterpart. The Senate dissolves only every six years, whereas the House ends every three years—and all the proposed bills filed within that period dies with every adjournment. Senate bills therefore avoid the problem of having to “die” every congressional term. Moreover, the Senate has only 24 members, in contrast to the House which has about eight times more. The fewer number of policy actors may be minimizing the frequency of lengthy conflicts in the Senate, facilitating the passage of bills.

Finally, inflation rate is used to proxy for socioeconomic conditions that may affect the chances of legislative success. All else constant, Model 1 predicts that an additional percentage rate in inflation during the 12-month period leading to the passage of that bill would reduce its lifespan to only five days although this is not statistically significant. Model 2 in contrast, suggests that if there was a higher inflation rate, the bill’s lifespan would increase by 1.5%. Both suggest, however, that inflation rate negligibly affects legislative process. The inflation rates used may have failed to consider inflationary shocks. Nonetheless, the last hypothesis of the study is confirmed but only in Model 2.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper argues that increased levels of media coverage lowers the chances of legislative success—defined here as the passage of a bill at the soonest possible time. It asserts that media is not merely a conduit of information but also a contributor. This explains why media causes friction in the policy process. But, of course, there are other variables highlighted in the study that also affect the policy process such as bill urgency, coauthorship, congressional origin, and socioeconomic condition. Thus, in analyzing 234 enacted bills from the 14th and 15th Congresses

of the Philippines, the effects of other determinants of legislative success were also gauged.

Results suggest primarily that media coverage reduces legislative speed. However, the effect of media coverage is on the whole miniscule (2.1%). Nevertheless, using media attention as a lobbying strategy appears to be counterproductive at the very least. Seeking the support of the chief executive—a strategy that overwhelms the effect of media coverage—is apparently the most effective. The results also suggest that having a bill certified as urgent can cut down a bill's lifespan in Congress by half. Likewise, bills that originate from the Senate enjoy 22% greater attention on average. This suggests that the Senate's institutional setup yields legislative advantage. Meanwhile, coauthorship and inflation rate seem to be negligible factors in the policy process. In total, at least for the second model, all hypotheses were confirmed but three of them yielded impractical results.

The study obviously has limitations. By analyzing two Congresses, it merely took a snapshot of the Philippine legislature. Moreover, it did not consider bills that failed to reach third reading. Thus, a longitudinal study of legislative proposals across multiple Congresses—including non-enacted, archived, or vetoed bills—is recommended. It may also be necessary to study bills qualitatively in connection with their respective congressional records to give detailed accounts of their developments in the floor. Subsequent analysis may also highlight the roles of legislative positions (floor leaders, committee chairs, etc.) and legislative processes (committee meetings, floor interpellations, etc.) which are often treated as black boxes.

Also, the statistical analyses employed did not consider the effects of variables that may vary across the time while the bills are in Congress. Using an event history analysis may address this problem but the data utilized here is insufficient for this sort of analysis. Additional variables may also be tested, such as socioeconomic indicators (other than inflation rate), legislators' profiles, legislative coalition-building, executive appearances, bill or issue type⁶, and legislative calendaring. Most importantly,

triangulating the results of this new quantitative model with qualitative research recommended in the previous paragraph may help paint a bigger and more detailed picture of the legislature together with the effects of media attention.

This study also limited its analysis of media attention to two online news sources, which may not be a highly representative sample. To address this problem, future study may consider other news sources such those in actual print, radio, and TV. In addition, the study did not analyze if the news articles induced positive or negative framing of bills. The limitation comes from relying on mention of bills in news articles, which makes it difficult to identify bill framing in the news. This could be addressed by conducting thorough content analysis with particular focus on framing rather than counting citations. This way, the effects of framing on legislative success can also be tested.

Nonetheless, by showing that media attention is not an entirely effective strategy for legislative success, this study reminds policy entrepreneurs and lobbyists to consider other and more effective strategies which are either internal or external to the policy arena. The classic childhood fable about the tortoise and the hare reminds that something as low-key as a slow tortoise can actually reach the finish line faster than an excitable hare.

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End Notes

- 1 According to the 15th Congress data from LEGIS (Legislative Information System), the RH bill stayed for 669 days, whereas the Cybercrime bill only spent 225 days (where days = number of days from a bill's proposal to its enactment)
- 2 Inquirer top newspaper, says poll. Philippine Daily Inquirer. Retrieved from: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/592317/inquirer-top-newspaper-says-poll>
- 3 According to LEGIS records as of July 1, 2015.
- 4 According to Article VII of the 1987 Constitution, a senator must be 35 years of age on election day (Sec. 3), while a member of the House of Representatives must be 25 years of age on election day (Sec. 6).
- 5 Poisson multiplier = $(IRR - 1) \times 100$. Thus, $(1.021 - 1) \times 100$ yields 2.1%, which means that for every unit change in x yields 2.1% change in y. The same follows for succeeding interpretations.
- 6 Alternative to policy issue is the level of controversy attached to a bill. However, the author warns that bill controversy can be circular, which means that controversy can be caused by media attention and, at the same time, by the intrinsic characteristics of a bill. Moreover, future research must avoid an arbitrary measure of controversy.

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